

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2310

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: PINR, PINT, SY
SUBJ: MUHAMAD ZUHAIR MASHARQA: MINISTER OF EDUCATION

1. ON MARCH 30, 1978, MUHAMAD ZUHAIR MASHARQ WAS NAMED MINISTER OF EDUCATION. HE RETAINS HIS SEAT ON THE BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND TO WHICH HE WAS ELECTED IN APRIL 1975 WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S BROTHER FIF'AT AL-ASSAD. ON THE REGIONAL COMMAND HE IS THE DIRECTOR OF THE EDUCATION BUREAU. HIS APPOINTMENT AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION COMES AT A TIME WHEN THE BAATH PARTY HAS BEEN CONCERNED THAT THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF SYRIA ARE NOT DISPLAYING THE PROPER BAATH PARTY ORIENTATION. HIS IS THEOLOGICAL CANDIDATE TO STRENGTHEN PARTY CONTROL OVER THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. WE UNDERSTAND HOWEVER, THAT PRIME MINISTER HALABI ORIGNALLY WANTED MASHARQA TO SERVE IN HIS CABINET AS MINISTER OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION BUT THAT HIS PROPOSAL WAS VETOED BY THE BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND. LOCAL ADMINISTRATION IS THE RANKING DOMESTIC MINISTRY AND ALONG WITH EDUCATION, ALWAYS DMONITED BY THE BAATH PARTY. THE REGIONAL COMMAND MAY HAVE VETOED MASHARQA FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION FOR FEAR THAT HIS MENTOR RIF'AT AL-ASSAD WOULD BE ABLE TO USE HIM TO MOVE LOYAL PEOPLE INTO THE KEY POSITIONS IN THE GOVERNORATES MUCH AS HE HAS ALREADY DONE IN EDUCATION.

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2. MASHARQA'S CLOSE TIES AND LOYALTY TO RIF'AT AS WELL AS HIS SEAT ON THE REGIONAL COMMAND GIVE HIM CONSIDERABLE POWER AND ABILITY TO RUN THE EDUCATON MINISTRY WITHOUT OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE. THIS SHOULD BE A NET PLUS FOR DECENTRALIZATION OF AUTHORITY. MASHARQA IS SAID TO KNOW HOW TO DELEGATE AUTHORITY SO HIS DEPUTY MINISTER, EID ABDO, SHOULD HAVA A FREER HAND IN RUNNING THE MINISTRY.

3. MASHARQA IS CONSIDERED TO BE PRO-WESTERN AND PRAGMATIC IN HIS POLICY APPROACH RATHER THAN BOUND BY BAATHIST IDEOLOGY EVEN THOUGH IS THE HEAD OF THE GDR-SYRO FREINDSHIP SOCIETY.

4. MASHARQA, A SUNNI, WAS BORN IN ALEPPO IN 1938. HE GRADUATED FROM DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY IN 1961 WITH A DEGREE IN EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY. HE EARNED A SPECIAL DIPLOMA IN ADMINISTRATION AND INSPECTION IN 1963 AT DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY AND A DEGREE IN LAW FROM ALEPPO UNIVERSITY IN 1968. HE RECEIVED HIS MASTERS DEGREE IN PEDAGOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY IN 1971 AT DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY.

5. FROM 1963-68 MASHARQA WAS THE PRINCIPAL OF THE ALEPPO TEACHER'S TRAINING SCHOOL. HE LEFT THIS POSITION TO BECOME DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL COMPANY OF SPINNING AND TEXTILES IN ALEPPO FROM 1969-71. FROM 1971-73 HE BECAME PRINCIPAL OF THE "FRERE MARISTE" PRIVATE SCHOOL IN ALEPPO AND FROM 1973-75 SERVED AS GOVERNOR OF HAMAA. FROM THERE HE WENT TO THE BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND.

6. MASHARQA IS MARRIED AND HAS TWO CHILDREN. HIS BROTHER, ABD AL-AZIZ MASHARQA IS THE SECRETARY OF THE ALEPPO BRANCH OF THE BAATH PARTY, A POWERFUL POSITION IN ITS OWN RIGHT.
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